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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SHENYANG 000076

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/CM, EAP/K, INR
MOSCOW PASS TO VLADIVOSTOK

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION
TAGS: [CH](#) [ECON](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: PRC-DPRK BORDER: CHINESE TENSE, NORTH KOREANS BUSY

REF: SHENYANG 56

Classified By: Consul General Stephen B. Wickman. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In light of the DPRK's detainment of two American journalists, Chinese officials have taken measures to tighten access by foreigners to border areas. Even areas previously open to tourists and foreigners are now restricted. Meetings with government, Public Security Bureau (PSB), and Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) officials all stressed the same theme: the border is sensitive and if you do come, please don't tell the provincial FAO. Meanwhile, the 60th anniversary of PRC-DPRK diplomatic relations is being commemorated all along the border regions by local officials; there seem to be more farmers and livestock active on the DPRK side than in recent memory, and there has been no noticeable change in cross-border trade since the DPRK missile launch. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Congenoff and assistant visited the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture April 12-15 and Dandong on April 8 to record developments along the North Korean border. Sites observed included Fangchuan/Tumangang, Quanhe/Wonjong-ri, Khunchun Land Port, Shuaiwanzijiao/Samanjagyo, Tumen/Namyang, Kaishantun/Sambong, Bangwon-ri, Hakpo-ri, and Sanhe/Hoeryong. Congenoff also met with officials from Hunchun and Changchun.

CHINESE SIDE: HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITIES...

13. (C) At every single point along the border, it was clear that the Chinese authorities had tightened their regulations and enforcement in response to the Amcit journalist incident. Normal access to designated tourist areas was impeded by freshly painted "off-limits" signs and brand-new "no trespassing" banners. People's Liberation Army Armed Police (PAP) guards are now wearing helmets and bulletproof vests at every land port, refusing access to sites previously accessible.

14. (C) FANGCHUAN/TUMANGGANG: Fangchuan is one of Hunchun City's only tourist traps, giving curious visitors an opportunity to visit a military border compound overlooking the point where China, Russia, and North Korea meet in the lower reaches of the Tumen River, with the Sea of Japan visible beyond the Russia-DPRK rail bridge. However, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) appropriated most of the compound in 2007, eliminating souvenir shops and tourist-related exhibits from all three floors of the small pavilion and allowed tourists only on the roof by the end of 2008.

The lone local vendor operating out of a tiny shack outside of the compound's security perimeter commented that the PLA took back control of the pavilion late last year and that the Hunchun Tourism Bureau was still trying to find an alternate location to build a new pavilion for tourists.

¶15. (C) QUANHE/WONJONG-RI: This land port is the closest Chinese border crossing to Rason and appeared to be as busy as ever. There were over 15 trucks, cars, and minibuses lined up on the bridge waiting to clear North Korean customs, and four more trucks on the Chinese side awaiting approval to drive onto the bridge at midday April 13. Despite previous rumors that the DPRK would shut down the market in Rason, Congenoff and assistant observed a normal, if not higher than usual, amount of traffic heading into North Korea.

¶16. (C) KHUNCHUN LAND PORT: By contrast, Hunchun's lone land port on the Russian border looked desolate. Signs in Chinese, Korean, and Russian greeted travelers, but the only activity witnessed was a half-empty Russian bus headed back to Russia. Shopkeepers at the souvenir shops commented that business was down, due to the weak state of the Russian economy.

¶17. (C) SHUAIWANZIJIAO/SAMANJAGYO: Like the much larger broken bridge in Dandong that allows tourists to walk out into the middle of the Yalu River, this much smaller, unmanned Japanese-colonial-era bridge is a regular tourist stop just off of the Hunchun-Tumen highway, and allows one to walk out over the Tumen River. However, as Congenoff approached the bridge, he encountered a large, freshly-hung,

SHENYANG 00000076 002 OF 004

red-and-yellow banner spanning the bridge, clearly stating the bridge was off-limits at the direction of the Yanbian PSB. There were also two large surveillance cameras mounted at the northern (Chinese) end of the bridge.

¶18. (C) TUMEN/NAMYANG: In a completely new move, PAP guards at the land port had donned bulletproof vests and helmets. Three-man teams conducted patrols along the riverbank, another unprecedented sight according to our assistant. After paying the obligatory entrance fee to the lookout and (normally) to the bridge, the guards prevented Congenoff and assistant from walking onto the bridge, citing a new policy that only Chinese tourists were allowed access. The PAP guard said foreign tourists were still allowed to visit the top of the gatehouse but that photography was prohibited. A vendor at a souvenir shop said these new policies had been in place since late March and suspected that it was related to the recent "capture" of the American journalists in Tumen. The vendor predicted that the stringent security measures would eventually be rescinded. A single North Korean locomotive came across the Tumen rail bridge into China during our stop around 9 a.m. April 13.

¶19. (C) KAISHANTUN/SAMBONG: Congenoff and assistant were denied access to the land port at Kaishantun mid-afternoon on April 14. The customs building and guardhouse looked new, but the surrounding parking lot and road leading to the bridge remain unpaved. There were two trucks lined up on the North Korean side of the bridge and no vehicles in the Kaishantun side. Kaishantun looked like a ghost town, with empty storefronts, vacant apartment buildings, and shuttered light industry.

¶10. (C) SANHE/HOERYONG: Congenoff and assistant attempted to visit the land port at Sanhe the same day but were denied access. There were three vehicles lined up at the Chinese side; the North Korean side was not visible from the road. The Sanhe facility appeared to be recently modernized.

¶11. (C) DANDONG: Congenoff and assistant were accompanied by the Dandong FAO to the famous broken bridge on the Yalu River and afterwards took a boat ride together late in the

morning on April 8, a few days after the North Korean missile test. There were at least 20 trucks, minibuses, and cars waiting on the bridge to clear North Korean customs, with many more at the Dandong Land Port waiting to clear Chinese customs - a regular amount of cross-border trade. There were at least 10 North Koreans strolling around the riverside park area and almost 20 North Korean men playing volleyball at a riverside dock. Dandong FAO Vice Director Yang Song said that Dandong City's cultural exchanges with the DPRK were ongoing and just recently, in recognition of the 60th anniversary of PRC-DPRK relations, an official North Korean dancing and singing troupe had given a series of performances in Dandong.

COUNTING COWS AND DOGS

¶12. (C) Congenoff and assistant observed more activity along the DPRK border than in previous years, with several groups of people and livestock visibly engaged in agricultural activities. While there was clear evidence of prior farming on the denuded hillsides and mountaintops all along the border, on this visit, no farming activity was observed at the higher elevations; all agricultural activity was focused on the lowland areas closer to the riverbank.

¶13. (C) NAMYANG: At the northernmost point of North Korea where the Tumen River makes a wide bend northeast of Tumen City, congenoff observed over 20 individuals setting fire to lowland fields in preparation for the spring farming season. Three well-fed cows lazed about nearby. Some 200 meters away from this work group, four similarly well-fed, mongrel dogs could be seen playing along the riverbank.

¶14. (C) BANGWON-RI: From a bluff just south of Kaishantun, congenoff saw three groups of 5-10 individuals each in the North Korean town of Bangwon-ri, along with four cows, one carting material on a road and the others plowing fields along the riverbank. A large excavator could be seen in the distance along the railroad. There was the occasional bicyclist and handcar, along with a two-car passenger train

SHENYANG 00000076 003 OF 004

seen heading downstream along the river between Hakpo-ri and Bangwon-ri.

¶15. (C) HAKPO-RI: Halfway between Kaishantun and Sanhe, at the relatively small North Korean village of Hakpo-ri, congenoff saw six cows along the riverbank, with three engaged in agricultural activity while the other three were grazing. Congenoff saw two groups of people farming in Hakpo-ri, along with five sheep/goats and two dogs roaming unaccompanied about 100 meters upstream.

LOCAL OFFICIALS: WE'RE BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

¶16. (C) Congenoff met (unofficially) in a one-on-one meeting with Yanbian Vice Governor Ximen Shunji (protect,) vice governor responsible for commerce, foreign affairs, tourism, and food and product safety. Ximen said he had been fully occupied in the weeks since the "journalist problem," working with provincial and central government officials to find a resolution. Ximen advised against official USG travel to Yanbian and other border regions in the future, and instead invited congenoff to visit Yanbian unofficially anytime, offering to pay all expenses and to meet whenever congenoff is in town. Ximen also mentioned that he had been forced to cancel his participation in a planned trip to Pyongyang by the Jilin Governor to explore further Chinese investment in North Korea (BIO NOTE: Governor Ximen's wife is a senior official in the Yanbian PSB. Their son went to a Chinese school and is now attending Jilin University. Their daughter attended the U.S.- and South Korean-affiliated Yanbian University of Science and Technology and is graduating this May from a U.S. sister school, California Baptist University.)

¶17. (C) Congenoff's sole official meeting with the Yanbian FAO was canceled the day before the Yanbian PSB was scheduled to turn over the the confiscated belongings of Mitchell Koss, the AmCit photographer who accompanied the two detained journalists and was investigated and subsequently released by Chinese authorities. Instead, Yanbian FAO Ms. Chi Yanhua (protect) made an unannounced arrival as the PSB meeting drew to a close, and escorted congenoff back to the hotel. During the 15-minute ride, Ms. Chi launched into an extended conversation and again invited congenoff to make an unofficial visit at "any time you would like." As for official travel, Chi said the FAO was too busy to entertain a visit from the Consulate that was not related to a specific consular case. When pressed for a potential time to start making official calls again, Chi said "perhaps November." She then reiterated that congenoff was welcome to visit unofficially at anytime and offered to meet unofficially.

¶18. (C) Congenoff spoke on the sidelines of the PSB meeting with the chief of the Yanbian Entry-Exit Administration Li Yongxue (protect.) Li was cordial and spoke comfortably about the fallout from the incident with the journalists. Li said that this episode had complicated the autonomous prefecture's relations with Jilin provincial officials and the central government, casting doubt upon their ability to handle the large number of foreigners engaged in various unauthorized activities along the border. Li told congenoff to contact him anytime, offering his phone number, which was a South Korean cell phone number.

OTHER NOTES

¶19. (C) Long-time North Korea hand and Jilin FAO Vice Director Cai Changqing is a Yanbian native, graduate of Kim Il Sung University, and has served as an official interpreter on many of his 100 visits to North Korea over his 30 year career with Jilin FAO. He recently attended an April 15 celebration for Kim Il Sung's birthday in Jilin City and will accompany the Jilin Governor on a trip to Pyongyang in late April to investigate investment opportunities in North Korea.

¶20. (C) Hunchun Party Secretary Liu Youlin, at a recent consulate-hosted lunch, said that his city's cultural exchanges with the DPRK have been robust except for the hiatus in the late 1990s and early 2000s when the DPRK's economy collapsed. Every year there is at least one

SHENYANG 00000076 004 OF 004

official governmental delegation exchange. Even at the middle school-level, there have been regular exchanges between Chinese and North Korean soccer teams. This year, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations, Hunchun and North Korea are increasing the frequency of their exchanges. In contrast, PS Liu said that there was almost no interaction with their Russian neighbors, surmising that the very small population of the Kraskino/Zarubino/Posyet region made it difficult for the Russians to match up with the much larger Hunchun.

COMMENT

¶21. (C) COMMENT: The latest high-profile border incident has brought this ethnic autonomous prefecture into the spotlight of the provincial and central government. Whether the heightened state of readiness along the border is merely for show or reflects real insecurity on the part of the Chinese government is hard to tell. Against this backdrop, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a consular travel warning on April 23 to its citizens about possible danger along the North Korean border. The ROK consulate here said the announcement was part of a broader initiative to show the public it was taking steps to reign in "adventure travel" and not the result of bilateral consultations. END COMMENT.

WICKMAN